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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 TUNIS 001092

SIPDIS

STATE FOR ECA/PE/V/R/N (KOTOB/MOODY); NEA/PPD (GLAZIER);
NEA/MAG (LAWRENCE)

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KPAQ](#) [QEXC](#) [SCUL](#) [TS](#)

SUBJECT: Mixed Tunisian reactions to Foreign Policy
Program

¶11. SUMMARY: While both of the Tunisian participants in the April 2005 Foreign Policy IV program were favorably impressed by American society, their impressions of the content of the program were quite varied. Ahlem ben Ali, a Tunisian journalist, related that she had learned many interesting and instructive things about the U.S. government, the role of the media, and civil society; Ahmed Idriss, a Tunisian university professor who teaches international relations, noted that he had not learned much from the substantive program that he did not already know and was disappointed at the level of interlocutors with whom they met. End Summary.

¶12. ACTIVITY: FY-05 RP "Foreign Policy Decision-Making Process"; EVDB Project number 2005-0009.

¶13. DATES: April 18 - May 6, 2005

¶14. OBJECTIVE: To expose participants to the constitutional and historical relationship between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government and to provide a clear understanding of the process of foreign-policy decision-making in the U.S. In the case of Ms. Ben Ali, the goal was to provide her with context for her coverage of U.S. foreign policy. For Mr. Idriss, the goal was to improve his knowledge of how foreign policy is determined in the U.S.

¶15. MPP GOAL: Democracy and Mutual Understanding.

¶16. IMPACT: Outstanding for Ms. Ben Ali. Ms. Ben Ali noted that the entire program, including all of the meetings and all of the interaction with the American people, were informative and helped her to better understand both American government and society. She was most impressed with the openness of all of the people she met, whether they were official interlocutors or people on the street, and remarked that she was surprised how interested Americans were in understanding the Arab viewpoint. She was also thankful that the official interlocutors made every effort to answer all of the participants' questions. She particularly appreciated the visit to an elementary school and the opportunity to present Tunisia to American children. Her one negative comment was that she noted that "civil society in the U.S. was not capable of influencing the government." When pressed, she stated that she was disappointed to see that money was the main factor that seemed to effect U.S. government decision-making, alluding to the relative strength of AIPAC versus the Arab-American organizations.

Good for Mr. Idriss. Mr. Idriss mentioned that certain meetings were very useful, in particular the meeting with A/S Rodman at the Pentagon and the visit to the university in Columbia, Missouri. The rest of the meetings he found disappointing, particularly given the fact that the interlocutors with whom they spoke were often "of a lower quality" than those originally promised in the program given to them prior to their departure. It would appear, that given Mr. Idriss' pre-existing knowledge of U.S. government systems, he was hoping to have a more profound discussion on foreign policy issues, rather than the more introductory look at U.S. systems that he received.

¶17. CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK: Both participants complimented the program organization and the quality of the translators. Both participants suggested that participants be provided at the outset with a list of how much they would have to pay for each night's stay, including the costs of breakfast if not included in the rate, so that they can better budget their stay in the U.S. They were both disappointed at not having had the opportunity for home hospitality. (Mr. Idriss was disturbed that a Meridian official had "tried to tell us that the visit to the farm in Missouri was home hospitality.") Both participants also regretted not having met with any think tanks in the U.S. Mr. Idriss stated that the participants did not quite understand the health insurance coverage provided in the program and noted that this confusion troubled some participants who

became ill during the program. Given Mr. Idriss' disappointment in the change in the level of interlocutors, Post suggests that names of officials be left out of the program so as not to raise false expectations. Neither participant experienced airport delays.

18. BRINGING LESSONS BACK HOME: Despite the negative feedback on the program contents, Mr. Idriss did return with a profound respect for the openness and kindness of the American people and for the organization skills of American society. He is sure to pass these impressions on to his students. Ms. Ben Ali's important exposure to the context in which U.S. foreign policy is made will inform her writings. She is in the process of preparing a series of articles for the bilingual weekly magazine for which she writes.

19. QUALITY OF ECA AND PROGRAM AGENCY SUPPORT: Excellent.

HUDSON